Naava Piatka

ARTIST – PLAYWRIGHT

AUTHOR – ENTERTAINER

HOLOCAUST EDUCATOR

Naava Piatka, the multi-talented internationally known artist / actress / playwright / author, born in Cape Town, South Africa on 21 March, 1952, died peacefully at age 57 on September 17, 2009 after a year long brave struggle with cancer.

Born to Holocaust survivor parents, Xavier Piat and Chayela Rosenthal, Naava began her performing career as a child, singing on stage with her cabaret star mother, Chayela, and her younger sister, Zola (www.zola.us). In High School, Naava won top honors in the Royal Academy of Music and other drama related competitions. After receiving her University of Cape Town BA degree in English and Drama, Naava taught at the Gertrude Haas Entertainment Educational Center, did radio work and held her sold-out first art exhibition of paintings of Jerusalem at the age of 22.

After moving to Johannesburg, Naava worked as a freelance journalist, started the art department at a local private school, exhibited her artwork in local galleries and co-founded Stages, a children's theatre company. After marrying and immigrating to the USA (1977) , Naava continued exhibiting and selling her fine art, working as an actress in regional theatre, writing and directing original musicals for Showstoppers, the theatre troupe for children she began at the Newton JCC.

Her local communities were enhanced by Naava's natural leadership and inspirational qualities. Along with her charity and volunteer work through her roles as president of Bedford Newcomer's Club, and Co-president of her children's school PTA, she also worked professionally as an event coordinator for the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, as well as drama coach, theatre director, workshop and seminar presenter, and keynote speaker on topics dealing with tolerance and forgiveness.

As a writer, Naava received a Massachusetts Cultural Council Grant to stage her full-length musical, won several Boston Playwrights' New Plays competitions and received commissions for her musical plays. She is a featured contributor in Cyndi Kaplan's "Awaken Your Business Creativity", and Joyce Schwarz's "The Vision Board", and in the One-By-One.Inc book "Transforming the Legacies of Conflict, War, and Genocide" on the collaborative making of her puppet "*Yisroilik*" with German descendant Helga Muller – the puppet being an integral character in Naava's one woman show about her Holocaust survivor/Yiddish actress mother.

In September of 2009, Naava's debut book "NO GOODBYES", a father-daughter memoir about Love, War and Resurrection, that she finished while battling her cancer and other health complications, was published just days before her passing and was listed in the top 100 bestsellers on Amazon.

As an actress, Naava was best known for her internationally acclaimed solo musical performance piece, “BETTER DON’T TALK” (aka. FINDING MY MOTHER’S VOICE) about the remarkable life and times of her Holocaust survivor actress mother, star of the Vilna Ghetto. From her debut Off Broadway at 59E59 Theatres, Naava traveled the world, winning rave reviews at The Edinburgh Fringe Festival, performing in Holocaust commemorations, Jewish Community Centers, cabaret conferences, museums, colleges and theatres in South Africa, Australia, Canada, Germany, Austria, the UK, Lithuania and throughout the United States. In Poland, performed this play in Yiddish on the same stage as her mom had performed on many decades before…

Naava wrote and delivered life-coaching motivational programs on multiple relevant topics and shared her unique, uplifting brand of Holocaust education and tolerance awareness through countrywide workshops, at schools, community venues and fundraising events.

Naava’s art career has included commercial graphic design, greeting cards, portraiture, and a diverse range of paintings in different styles, from realistic to abstract and mixed media. Her paintings, sold at various galleries from Cape Town to Boston to Englewood, New Jersey, are now held in private collections internationally.

Following her divorce after 22 years of marriage, Naava moved to New York and then New Jersey, where she continued to inspire new communities with her zest for life, her feisty passion energy, warm and loving personality, her spiritual wisdom, and wide range of creative talents. All over the world, friends took pleasure in her festive parties and riveting storytelling of her exciting travels to places like Israel, Bali and Peru.

Both on and off stage, Naava entertained with her distinct ebullient life force of positive energy, humor and depth, moving people to tears, laughter and perceptive insights. Her personal mission of Tikkun Olam, healing the world, was ever present in both her creative works and personal actions.

A devoted and caring daughter to her immigrant Holocaust survivor parents, a loving and fun older sister, a warm, caring and inspiring mom, a special – albeit brief time as – grandma, an excellent cook and homemaker, a friend to all, a teacher, leader, mentor and so much more….. Naava, an unforgettable, radiant force of life, love and laughter, who passed away at age 57, after a courageous battle with cervical cancer, leaving behind her children Chantal Rotondo, Dan Levitt, Jaclyn Levitt, and her son-in-law, Peter Rotondo, grandson Zachary Rotondo, sister Zola Shuman, brother-in-law, Selwyn Shuman and extended family, friends and so very many fans around the world… and her granddaughter Alaina, born after she passed.

The physical form that was Naava is buried at the Temple Emeth Memorial Park, 776 Baker St/ Dedham Street, on the West Roxbury/Newton border – Massachusetts, – laying alongside her father, Xavier.

Dedicated to honoring and memorializing her family’s inspirational legacy of creating music and theatre during the Holocaust, Naava’s goal was to impart the message of the triumph of creativity over tragedy, the importance of arts and culture, and the need for ongoing communication to address the present and heal the past.

The creative arts talent, as legacy in her family, is ongoing through the works of her talented children: Jaclyn (Singer-Songwriter and creative Barber & Hair Stylist), Dan (Long Haul Management) and Chantal (Long Haul Management) and her Billboard award winning, singer-songwriter /recording artist sister, ZOLA (www.zola.us).

L I N K S:

"**BETTER DON'T TALK"** – Full length **musical** : https://youtu.be/vPGXrXd5ha8

"**NO GOODBYES**" – trailer about the **book**
: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfj2m3TvUMY

Naava talks about writing the book: Part 1 *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb6a7H-e7sA*

Part 2: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbUwptTyxIc*

Purchase the book here: *https://www.amazon.com/No-Goodbyes-Father-Daughter-Memoir-Resurrection-ebook/dp/B0791LMC97*

Talking about her illness – Part 1 : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrVNWNKM1aE

Part 2 : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coXAZHz57m4

Naava's Facebook Remembrance Page: https://www.facebook.com/rememberNaava/

Naava's ARTWORK :

https://www.invaluable.com/artist/piatka-naava-05ysy3esnq/sold-at-auction-prices/

https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/34781187_-nin-tu-1988-acrylic-on-canvas-by-naava-piatka

Articles about Naava by friends and colleagues:

- https://www.successcircles.com/remembering-naava-piatka/
- https://topmrt.com/in-memory-of-naava-piatka-living-life-fully-and-loving-her-life/
- https://www.dramaaroundtheglobe.com/editors-desk/dear-naava-piatka
- https://htc.miami.edu/the-aftermath-of-war-second-generation-performance-art/
- https://archive.org/details/podcast_coaches-corner-with-coach-an_coaches-corner-with-coach-and_1000332024945

CHAYELA ROSENTHAL & XAVIER PIAT (mom & dad) *:* www.chayela.com

ZOLA (sister) **:**www.zola.us

DAN LEVITT (son) **:** https://www.longhaulmgmt.com

author

artist

Actress

motivational
speaker

singer

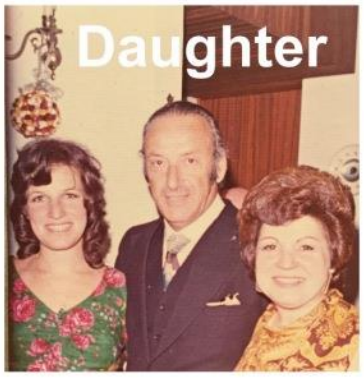
musician

nature lover

Sister

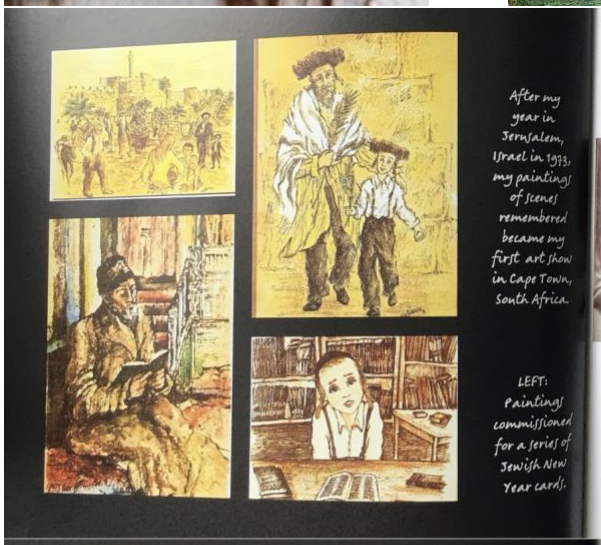
MOM to these three

Nana Naava - (grandma)


Daughter

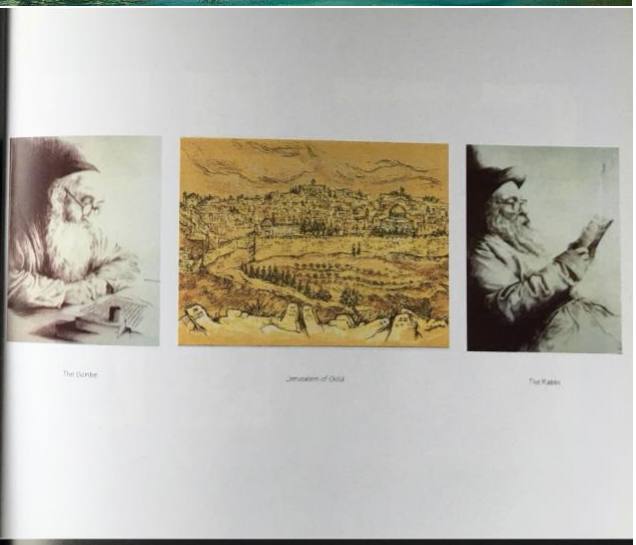
NAAVA PIATKA
MAR. 21, 1952 – SEPT. 17, 2009
RADIANT, INSPIRING & CREATIVE
SISTER, MOM, NANA & FRIEND
REMEMBERED WITH LAUGHTER & LOVE

ART by NAAVA
NO GOODBYES
A FATHER-DAUGHTER MEMOIR OF LOVE, WAR AND RESURRECTION
NAAVA PIATKA
BETTER DON'T TALK!
Written and Performed by
NAAVA PIATKA
BETTER DON'T TALK!



After my year in Jerusalem, Israel in 1973, my paintings of scenes remembered became my first art show in Cape Town, South Africa.

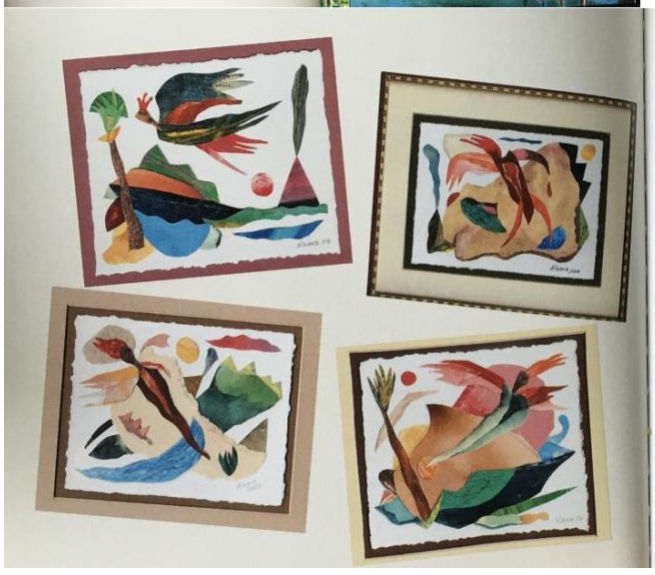
LEFT: Paintings commissioned for a series of Jewish New Year cards.



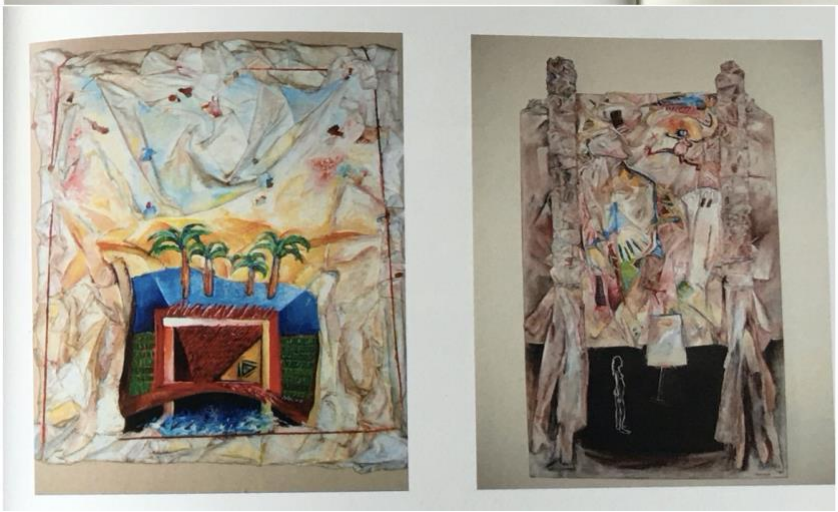
The Bumbe

Jerusalem of Gold

The Rabbi



L'il Devil
L'il Sweetheart
L'il Angel
L'il Monkey
Plaster design
L'il Red Riding Hood
Greeting cards
Book illustration



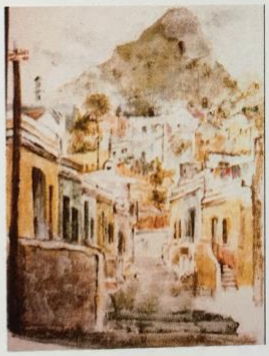
Mother.
Faces of Africa

Homeless.
Faces of Africa

Cape Town City Hall.
Cape Scenes

Sisters.
Faces of Africa

Children of the Street.
Faces of Africa



Lion's Head.
Cape Scenes

Coon Carnival.
Cape Scenes

In the Doorway.
Cape Scenes

NO GOODBYES: Open letter to Naava Piatka (1952-2009)

11/1/2009 0 Comments

By Henrik Eger

Dear Naava Piatka,

When I met you at the international conference of the Association for Jewish Theatre in Vienna two years ago, I was immediately struck by your passion for theatre, for the arts, for people. And when I saw you up on stage, bringing parts of the past into our own lives with *Better Don't Talk: A Holocaust Story*—"A daughter discovers her mother's hidden past. The uplifting musical theater tribute to comedienne Chayela Rosenthal, wunderkind of the Vilna Ghetto"—I was fighting tears. At the same time, you also made me laugh and feel empowered by your art, your work, your life.

And then, when you got one of the biggest rounds of applause at the international conference when Deborah Baer Mozes, artistic director of Theatre Ariel, the Jewish theatre here in Philadelphia, walked up to the stage at the famous monastic Piaristenkeller, together with Robin Hirsch and a birthday cake and a flame which shot high up on that stage.

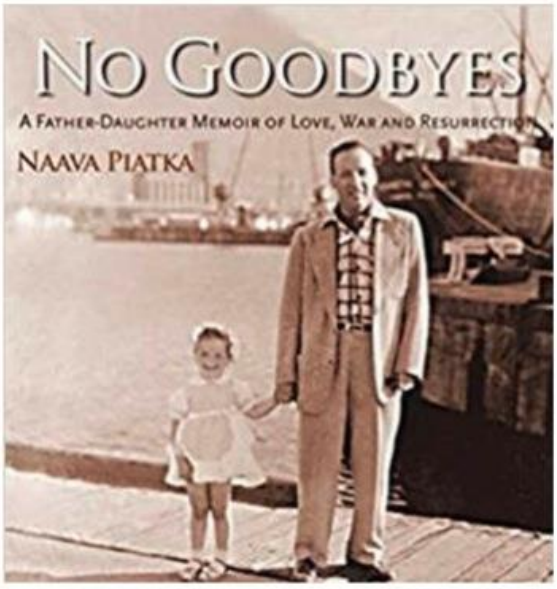
Deborah Baer Mozes, Philadelphia, and Robin Hirsch, New York, present Naava Piatka a birthday cake, celebrating her life in front of the entire international Jewish theater congress in Vienna's classiest palatial restaurant, the Piaristenkeller, March, 2007.

I will never forget the way you held your hands up to your chin in utter surprise, radiating even more joy and energy than before—if that is possible.

I spoke to you afterwards, wanted to see more of your work, wanted theatre goers in the Philadelphia area to come and see you on stage. You gave me your card, we had a short correspondence, and then our communication seemed to disappear in the sand of time.

Naava, I did not know at the time that you were fighting cancer—just as I did not know that my only sister was struggling with breast cancer for four years. And by the time we knew, it was too late.

It wasn't until a few weeks ago, Naava, that your joyful letter came in, if "joyful" is the right word. You announced with great enthusiasm that your very first major publication *No Goodbyes*—"a father-daughter memoir about love, war and resurrection," was just published and made available on Amazon.com. I was thrilled for you but also stunned when I learned in the same email that your days on this earth were numbered because of cancer.



Frankly, I did not know what to do. Should I buy the book and send you a get-well card, even though you had made it quite clear that the end was near?

Naava, some people might visit with some chicken soup, others who live in your neighborhood might come by and hug you and listen to you.

I can't cook and I could not visit, but I write plays. And strange as it may sound, I wanted to write a play for you, wanted you, like Alice in Wonderland, present extraordinary stories, except that the Holocaust, alas, is more than a string of strange adventures underground.

Naava, I was so moved by your joy, your energy which you kept to the very end, that I was determined to write a short play for you and about you by Hanukkah.

And then I saw your final farewell—as real, as loving, and as dignified as always. Thank you for giving even during the last few days of your life, whether your first video or your second document for us. Watching your videos, you not only come back, but you keep sharing and connecting the present with the past--an endless cycle of giving.

Naava Piatka, Final farewell, part 1, Aug. 30, 2009.

And then your sister's letter arrived, informing all of us that you had left, the way you had announced it via your book title: *No Goodbyes*. To me that was your way of saying, "Move forward, friends. Don't be sad." I appreciate the encouragement to move forward, but I am struggling with the sadness part.

So, Naava, what did I do to find some solace? I went to the mother of all video sites and searched for some of the best versions of Ravel's "Kaddisch"—music which brings tears to my eyes every single time. I know, men are not supposed to cry, but the images that this piece of music evokes are so strong that I don't resist those "mélodies hébraïques."

And while I listened to the various versions on YouTube, I came across a new version of the "Kaddish," sung by your Israeli sister, Ofra Haza, who also passed away before her time. Her boundless energy and beauty reminded me of you. I found her "Kaddish" so engaging that I had to listen to it almost nonstop. Wherever you are, Naava, feel free to play it. This very special Kaddish is for you.

As you know, I come from Germany and my father, a young Third Reich propaganda officer and war correspondent, who, through his writing, contributed to the misery that silenced the voices of millions of people. A Molotov cocktail killed him and his driver in Russia in 1944. I wish I could write about my father the way you did.

However, I wanted the next generation to know what happens when one follows a persuasive, dangerous pied piper. It wasn't until my father witnessed a mass execution in Russia that he lost his voice, his will to live. That's why I wrote *Metronome Ticking*, the only Holocaust docudrama where the son of an Austrian Holocaust survivor and the son of a German war correspondent appear on stage together, even changing roles halfway through the play. We want to help audiences understand that it's a pure coincidence of nature that we were born into a specific family or a particular culture in history.

Dear Naava, until recently, I have never had the chance to visit a family who sat shiva with relatives and friends, but I imagine it to be a time rich in memory of you, Naava.

And so, I would like to send your family, especially your children, the link to the "Shluchim Song," composed by Yossi Green, and sung by a young Israeli singer, Ohad Moskowitz, whose voice expresses better than anything I could say how I feel right now about you and all those who left us before their time.

Ohad Moskowitz, Israel, sings the Shluchim Song by Yossi Green.

Last but not least, I never have planted a tree in Israel, but now I want to do that—in your name. May that sapling grow and become as unique a tree as Naava Piatka. And then, one day, we might say: **Till next year, under Naava's tree,** not in Jerusalem, but in a place where the land really needs strong trees, strong trees like you, Naava.

Ave Vale, Naava, fare thee well, auf Wiedersehen, and as many SHALOMS as find space on each leaf of your tree, on each page of your book—your farewell gift to us.

Thank you, Naava, from the United States, and a special "ačiū" from Lithuania, a sunny "baie dankie" from South Africa, a grateful and pensive "Dankeschön" from Germany, and a welcoming "toda lach" from Israel, you wonderful mensch.

Naava, you will live on in all those who knew you, in all those who will discover your book, even 100 years from now, and in all those who, one day, will find shade under your tree in Israel—the Naava Piatka tree.

Shalom, Naava, Shalom, Shalom.
Henrik

This letter was originally published by *All About Jewish Theatre*, Tel Aviv, Israel, October 2009. Retrieved via the Wayback Machine and updated with additional information and illustrations.